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ABSTRACT

If an ESL student has his learning time largely devoted to the study of linguistic form, taking an essentially passive role and rarely speaking English in any interactive context, he is experiencing the excommunicative approach. If what he actually requires is the communicative approach, his time should be devoted to using and manipulating whatever English he has, with support, to get his message across. The skills required of the teacher in this approach involve producing material that will stimulate the student to talk to someone. Classroom activities would include exercises that give students roles and topics, and the center of attention would shift from the teacher in the front of the room to the students. However, the problem facing teachers is not developing materials or moving around the classroom, but the required mental transfer from language form to language function. Keeping in mind the essential properties of a communicative activity, teachers can develop activities and exercises that encourage students to manipulate whatever linguistic resources they have rather than spend their time searching for precise structure or vocabulary. (Author/MSE)

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(and how to avoid it)

George Yule

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THE EXCOMMUNICATIVE APPROACH (and how to avoid it)

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If an ESL student has her learning time largely devoted to the study of linguistic form, taking an essentially passive role and rarely speaking English in any interactive context, she is experiencing the excommunicative approach. If what she actually requires is the communicative approach, then her time should be devoted to using and manipulating whatever English she has, with our support, to get her message across. This paper offers some ideas on how this might be accomplished.

It is a standard principle in semiotics, the general study of signaling systems, that it is impossible not to communicate. In simple terms, this means that if you sneeze, you communicate, if you are wearing a hat, you are communicating, and if an ESL student says this my this this my em yes, she's communicating.¹ Consequently, a methodology which is labeled "the Communicative Approach" could be interpreted as a system designed to get people to do what they're doing already and, in essence, cannot avoid doing. Presumably, ESL teachers have something else in mind when they say they would like to make their classroom teaching more "communicative" in orientation. So, what does "communicative" mean in this context? I doubt if I will be able to provide anything resembling a complete answer to this question, but I may come up with one or two useful ideas on

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¹The problem of the appropriate pronoun to be used when referring to a teacher or a student has been resolved in this paper by opting for the feminine forms throughout.

what is and what is not a "communicative" activity.²

To do this, I will suggest that the concept of "communicative," as it relates to human behavior, in the context of ESL, has to do very broadly with participation, or training which facilitates participation, of a primarily linguistic nature, in the activities of the wider community of English speakers. The connection proposed has a basis in the etymological connection between "communicate" and "community." By way of contrast, I will use the term "excommunicative," again within the limited world of ESL, to characterize acts or activities which serve to remove the ESL student from participation, or training which does not facilitate participation, in the community of English speakers. The contrast should become clearer in the course of the paper. First, let us try to put some harder edges on the extremely fuzzy notion of "communicative" behavior.

SOME FEATURES OF COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOR

It's Intentional

The earlier examples of sneezing, hat-wearing, and word-uttering are clearly not the type of "communicative" behavior an ESL teacher normally wishes to promote. This type of 'signaling' (to use a more neutral expression) can certainly lead the receiver of the signal to have some information about the person from whom the signal originates, but it is unlikely that the information so received was voluntarily or intentionally sent. So, let us call such signals informative, define them as unintended, and limit the term communicative to signals which are intentionally sent.

²This paper is full of ideas which were, for the most part, prompted by students in the graduate ESL program at the University of Minnesota, who forced me to make my thoughts on the matter clearer. Credit for whatever seems worthwhile in this paper should consequently be shared with those students. Responsibility for what seems mistaken or badly expressed is all mine.

(For more on this terminological distinction, see Lyons, 1977:33.)

It's Recipient-designed

Yet, intention alone is hardly sufficient as defining communicative behavior. We need a means of disqualifying all intentional communicative behavior which does not take the receiver into account, particularly the receiver's ability to comprehend the message. For example, one of your ESL students can intentionally communicate what she thinks of you (who don't speak the Spanish of northern Mexico) by uttering, "no sirves ni de cacahuete." However, her signal is not designed to facilitate your comprehension of the intended communication. She might even be smiling when she says it, but you probably would not be, if genuine communication had taken place.³ So, we also need a factor involving "designed for the recipient's comprehension" to be incorporated within our concept of communicative behavior.

There's an Information Gap

Closely connected with the notion of recipient-design is the requirement that communication usually operates with the assumption of an information gap. To be considered communicative, a verbal message must, in some sense, provide information which the speaker believes the hearer does not have. That is, the speaker must operate as if the message she is communicating is not already known to the hearer. This seems a rather obvious point, since we tend not to spend our time telling each other all the things we assume are known, but rather place a premium on telling "what's new."

³Well, it depends on whether you like to be told that "you don't even do as much as a peanut."

There's a Purpose

However, we do not simply recite random new information to our partners in communication. We usually have some purpose in giving a particular item of information to one person rather than another. In most instances, the purpose is very clear because the hearer needs the information. In fact, one of the ways in which we might identify pathological or mentally-unbalanced behavior would be if an individual started telling you random, purposeless information. So, we would want to exclude such verbal messages from the range of communicative behavior.

It's Appropriate

There are no doubt a number of other factors, but let us consider only one more, concerning "appropriateness". For many theorists, notably Hymes (1972), this factor is crucially important and can be more narrowly defined as "sociolinguistic appropriateness." In simple terms, it has to do with the distinction between using an expression like Please leave me alone and an alternative like Get lost, you creep. Knowing when, where, and to whom these expressions might be appropriate ways of communicating what you mean is an essential facet of what Hymes called the English speaking person's "communicative competence."

INTO THE ESL CLASSROOM: EXCOMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES

We have listed some properties which can serve as identifying features of communicative behavior. We are not necessarily aware of such components in our everyday use of language, but we normally have no difficulty recognizing that some element is missing. That is, we know when something is "odd" or "off-key" in someone's interactive behavior. We know what "normal" participation in a verbal interaction (between speakers of English) feels like and we know how communicative behavior fits into that "norm." Yet, we can also pick up our chalk, our books, our handouts, and walk into ESL classrooms, and, in many ways, ignore what counts as "normal" participation in communication via the English language.

I do not pretend that there are not a number of excellent reasons why this comes about. Much of what we do in the classroom stems from the requirements of existing course goals, established syllabus designs, compulsory textbooks, and the nature of standard English language tests. Such requirements have, for a number of years, been a source of frustration and dissatisfaction for many ESL teachers. The constraints created by such requirements have locked us into a number of activities which cannot really be carried over into our so-called "communicative approach."

To return to the issue: we have some idea of what one would expect in communicative language use, yet we also have a suspicion that this is not what's being fostered, at least some of the time, in ESL classrooms. What is being fostered, I will suggest, is some type of "excommunicative" language use, which may be serving as a means of removing ESL learners from participation in the community of English speakers. What are these obvious excommunicative activities which turn up in classrooms ostensibly devoted to the communicative approach?

Let us start with some really clear examples of excommunicative English language behavior. Having an ESL student, comfortably seated among her excommunicated peers, produce sentences like I'm coming to school now, I was coming to school yesterday, I will be coming to school tomorrow is one example. In fact, anything resembling a drill, concentrating on the forms of the English language, is inherently excommunicative. It may be useful for a number of other purposes (for example, passing tests which focus on correctness of form), but it is not communicative.

However, not so obviously to many people, an exercise which asks Maria to disagree with Chang one way, then to use another way, and then to do it another way, is, in fact, another example. This exercise may produce I can't agree with you, I can't accept your argument, I beg to differ. Reciting phrases of this type is the product of a lot of 'functional' course materials which have not really changed the format for student participation, but have changed the types of expressions which can be recited. Essentially, students are given the opportunity

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to practice, via repetition, not the progressive verb forms, or different tense forms, but ten ways to disagree in English or ten ways to ask for permission. Here is an example from a course called Communicate, by Morrow & Johnson (1979:76).

You have rented a room in Mrs. Armstrong's house. Here are some things that you want to do. To be polite, you ask Mrs. Armstrong first. You say ...

Could I possibly have a TV in my room?
Could I possibly put some pictures on the walls?
Could I possibly ask some friends to call round?
(plus seven other 'Could I possibly...' sentences)

Now ask her permission in three other ways.

I'd like to ...
You don't mind if ...
Do you mind if ...

I suspect that, by this point, Mrs. Armstrong is about to come after you with a carving knife. Exercises of this type may also serve some purpose in the grand ESL scheme, but they are not communicative activities. At best, any exercise on form, whether the form of the present progressive or the form for asking permission, is merely a prerequisite for communicative activities. At worst, and more typically, such exercises are insidiously excommunicative, since they are so dominant in the ESL student's experience with the English language. They are what we give the ESL student to do with the English language, and mostly, we don't move on to have her do anything else. If the English speaking community needed members who can repeat sets of phrases and carry out substitution drills, then we have the trainees. Unfortunately, it doesn't. Such exercises lead students to say what they don't mean, without purpose, in artificial interaction, with no intentions, no recipient, no information gap, and no sense whatsoever of where, when and to whom such expressions would really be appropriate. They are

not communicative.

SOURCES OF THE EXCOMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

Teacher-centered Classrooms

Most of the activities which tend to have an excommunicative effect can be identified in the typical formats of strongly teacher-centered classrooms. The student spends most of her time in a receptive role, she is not encouraged to initiate interaction, and, when she is called upon to speak, the expected linguistic production tends to be very brief, phrase- or short sentence-length, and it will inevitably be in the form of a response. In fact, if the student tries to break out of this essentially passive role, it can look like a disruption of the teacher's lesson plan. In a recent paper, Allwright (1984) cites a nice example to illustrate the teacher's desire to get on with what was planned and a student's attempt to interrupt that plan and get what she needs.

Teacher: Okay, let's get back to this

Student: Oh, please. At the second line, on second sentence it is, says: "which word means 'hatred'?" (Pause) What is 'hatred'?

In a sense, this brief exchange contains another clue to the results of the excommunicative approach. The student's production in this example is typical of the type of communicative style a number of students develop by themselves. It is very much a format for classroom communication. The ability to use the English language in this way is not something we ordinarily teach. It illustrates the kind of strategy the students develop by themselves to try to compensate for the perceived gaps in their lessons. Some teachers discourage this type of interruption on the grounds that it plays havoc with the lesson plan.

The Model we Provide

Let us focus on a different aspect of the classroom interactive

format which may foster excommunication. Typically, the teacher directs interaction by asking questions to which she already knows the answers. This is not a particularly novel observation - indeed, such behavior may simply be an occupational hazard for all teachers, a kind of classroom silicosis. However, though it may have a traditional place, it surely cannot be part of a 'communicative' approach. The function of questions in the English speaking community at large is surely more often aimed at getting information you do not know. Questions can also be used to make sure that what you thought was, in fact, correct. So, lack of information or doubt about the correctness of information seem to be the general motivating factors, in life. However, in the standard ESL classroom, the teacher's status tends to be that of "knower." When she asks a question, she can tell you whether your answer was correct or not. Now this is the model of interaction involving questions which most ESL students are given. What if they adopt the model? Imagine, in an admittedly exaggerated scenario, a student speaking to a man at the information counter at the Greyhound depot in Minneapolis.

Student: When the next bus is to Duluth?

Clerk: Twelve fifteen

Student: That's correct - very good - now how long this bus it take?

Clerk: It's about three hours - it's an express

Student: Yes - that's right - good - so now - how much is it cost?

Clerk: Listen honey - if you're so smart you tell me

How can there be anything wrong with this student's interactive style? She is taking her teacher's interactive style in the classroom as a model. So, why would the counter clerk get annoyed? Well, he probably feels that he is being "tested" on his knowledge, rather than being genuinely asked to convey information. His reaction is to relinquish his normal role in such interactions and effectively stop taking part. What should be a "communicative" activity for the student becomes

"excommunicative." Yet, one can imagine that, in such a situation, the student would not understand why the clerk stopped participating. It would be just another puzzling experience, confirming the student's impression that she will never be successful at using English, even though she carefully follows her teacher's example.

The Corrections We Provide

Another example of how an ostensibly "communicative" activity quickly becomes "excommunicative" involves the way in which student production is treated. In the following fragment of classroom interaction, the teacher and students have been reading some instructions on how to pay bills for utilities. (The students were adult Asian immigrants to Britain receiving a version of ESL "survival skills.") The question and answer format used here is really intended to check that the students have understood the "content" of what they have read. It should, then, be focused on the content, rather than the form of the message.

- Teacher: and where do you have to take this bill?
Student: is - em - is in the bost office
Teacher: you mean 'post' - say it "p - p - p - post - post"
Student: 'post - 'post'
Teacher: right - say it everyone - 'post'
All students: 'post' - 'post'
Teacher: right okay - the post office - good

Useful though it certainly is for the students to have their aberrant pronunciations corrected, we might argue that there are better occasions than in the middle of a discussion about "content." On this particular occasion, the distraction caused by the little pronunciation exercise leads the teacher to accept the wrong 'content' answer. The instructions which the students had been reading involved the post office, but not as the place to take the bills received.

Let us be clear about what seems amiss in the quoted interaction. There is no suggestion that the teaching of

accurate pronunciation should be neglected. Quite the contrary - everyone would agree that a certain level of ability in the pronunciation of English is a prerequisite for any communicative ability. However, the teaching of pronunciation, even remedially, should not take place in the middle of a communicative activity. If we wish to teach the correct form of English utterances, whether in pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary, we really should not be trying to do it in the middle of message-oriented, communicative interaction. Why not have the communicative interaction take place and, if the teacher expects that aspects of "form" in the students' production will need some attention, then tape-record the interaction for later use in a form-oriented lesson. This has the benefit of letting a communicative interaction concentrate on message-content and operate on the level of "getting meaning across," while creating a good set of data for the next lesson which is form-oriented and operates on the level of "becoming formally accurate."

Moreover, if pronunciation and grammar points derive from the students' own tape-recorded production, this is surely an advantage. Our students, like most people, are probably more interested in themselves than in others. They may be more motivated to try to learn the formally accurate version of the English present perfect, for example, if it is apparent from their own tape-recorded speech that they need to learn it.

ON SPOKEN COMMUNICATION

While some attention should be paid to the formal accuracy of our students' speech, we should be careful not to set unrealistic goals for the spoken communicative use of English. The way the English language is used in the spoken mode is not really directly comparable to its use in typical written formats. Many researchers have pointed out that there are fairly substantial differences between spoken and written discourse (cf. Ochs, 1979; Tannen, 1982; Brown & Yule, 1983). Yet, as ESL teachers, we often bring a written language version of precision and accuracy to bear on the spoken language production of our ESL students. It may be because we spend so much time

immersed in the written language and our education to become ESL teachers places such a premium on our being highly literate. Whatever the reason, we seem to lose touch with some of the looser and vaguer features which characterize everyone's spoken discourse. Here is an example:⁴

eh I think it's important that we do this eh I think that for one thing it's always helped me in the past because when I've done that and I've been - been have some - a number of times before ...

So, is this student in need of a grammar lesson, since he says I've been - been have some - ? Whatever you think of Casper Weinberger, the current Secretary of Defense, who produced the speech transcribed above, you would probably not insist that his use of the English language was faulty. I think we should take care not to require that the spoken production of our ESL students be "better" or more "correct" than is normally found among native speakers.

BACK TO THE EXCOMMUNICATIVE APPROACH: IS IT REALLY SO BAD?

I think it should be fairly clear that what I have described as the "excommunicative" approach is really characterized by an overemphasis on accuracy of form, brief contributions by students, usually responding rather than initiating, in passive roles, within a teacher-centered classroom. The effect of such an approach, one might predict, would be that students would not be adequately prepared to participate in the activities of the general English speaking community. One can ask if this is such a terrible outcome.

Let us not misinterpret the effects of a school experience which largely consists of excommunicative activities. Activities

⁴This example is taken from a speech to the National Press Club during May, 1984, and is part of data collected by John Raiter.

of this type may actually have benefits. Removal from one community, particularly one which is stressful for the individual, may have compensations in terms of membership in an alternative community. One community which seems to have a thriving population might be termed "the ESL-classroomees". Members of this community can develop quite remarkable proficiency in producing English language material such as I was tall last night, I'm taller tonight, and I will be the tallest next week, without actually 'using' any English outside the classroom. I'm sure many Americans become "French-classroomees" or "German-classroomees" by a similar process of excommunication, not by choice necessarily, but rather by misdirection. A certain amount of ritual understanding takes place in such communities, since turn-taking formats such as the following can be performed with ease:

Comment allez-vous?
Wie geht es Ihnen?

Je vais bien, merci
Ganz gut, danke

Yet, membership of the "French-classroomees," for example, seems not to be convertible very readily into membership of the community of French speakers. It is sort of like taking up rollerskating in order to be able to join the rollerskating group of desirable members of the opposite sex in summer parks, and take part in associated pleasures, only to end up becoming proficient at rollerskating. Only. Actually, you can go on to pass rollerskating tests, even get your degree ("B.R."), and lead a contented life. You may be indistinguishable from those who chose rollerskating for its own sake and never thought of alternative pleasures.

The point is, getting back to the ESL students, that the results of excommunication, personally chosen or imposed, are not necessarily bad. They are only bad, as the Catholic will tell the Protestant, if you really didn't set out to be excommunicated. We should also remember that membership in other communities may already be such a powerful influence that there is no real interest in joining the community of English speakers. Some visitors to the community overtly mark their excommunicated status by having interpreters act as go-betweens.

AVOIDING EXCOMMUNICATION

So, what about those ESL students who want to become members of the community of English speakers? Given the constraints of inappropriate environments, such as classrooms, there are nevertheless a number of strategies we can provide them with. Note that it cannot be the aim of these strategies to turn the ESL student into an American nor to enable her to pass as an undercover agent. It cannot be our brief to modify personalities or to change identities. Rather, the aim has to be to provide those skills which enable each student to participate in the community as a Hmong medical technician who speaks English, or a Swedish doctor who speaks English, and so on.

The Communicative Approach

In meeting this goal, I suspect that we should try to be more honest about what the so-called "communicative approach" offers. It does not typically offer, and this is all too often hidden in the small print, any means of providing the student with, for example, basic grammatical knowledge of the English language. If the student needs to be able to produce forms like I went and I have gone, with consistent accuracy and in the correct linguistic contexts, there is unlikely to be any guidance within a communicative syllabus which would prevent her from saying I gone and I have went. Generally, those who promote the "communicative approach" behave as if someone else is responsible for the students having acquired proficiency in the grammar and pronunciation of English.

Others, such as Stephen Krashen in his promotion of acquisition via the "natural approach" (cf. Krashen & Terrell, 1983), seem to believe that English grammar will just "happen" to the student. It's sort of like painting a wall by the "let's-throw-buckets-of-paint-at-it" method. If we throw enough English language at the student, some of it will stick, and acquisition will take place. Unfortunately, some of the painters, metaphorically speaking, are getting a bit frustrated at what is now being discovered to be, in essence, an absence of methodology. The walls remain unpainted and, what's more, everything is in a mess.

Indeed, it may now be becoming clear that the "communicative approach" cannot, in fact, be treated as a teaching methodology in the literal sense. It is not an approach which provides a teacher with a method of "teaching." It has to be treated as a means of determining what kinds of activities take place in classrooms and what kinds of materials are used. In many ways, it requires that the teacher remove herself from the center of activity in the classroom and take a facilitator or stage-manager role, rather than the main character part of the past. It also has to allow, by its format, that I gone and I have went become acceptable within their communicative contexts of use. In simple terms, if those forms work for the students in terms of communication, then they are inherently successful uses of the English language.

This may sound like bad news to someone with an aversion to accepting grammatical error in any English speech, but it would make sense to those who believe that second language acquisition takes place via the development of a student's ability through a series of approximative systems towards eventual competence in the target language. This, of course, is what the term "interlanguage" is designed to describe. At any stage, "mistakes" are to be expected. If "getting the message across" really is the aim, then the only "mistakes" that should worry us are those which interfere with that aim.

Talking about "Mistakes"

To make provision for a more consistent use of accurate forms such as I went and I have gone, when they are required, in the students' speech may in fact demand more than is usually associated with the "communicative approach." It may require "breaks" from communicative activities, during which some attention is devoted to formal accuracy.

We can, of course, take these "breaks" as opportunities to be "heavy" about the inaccuracies we hear. It may be that some student groups will welcome the occasional session on: "Look, folks, you're all doing this wrong and you've got to quit it. Let me show you how English speakers like to do this" Unfortunately, this type of approach can, in effect, create a lot

of distance between teacher and students. It can have a totally negative effect and may only work with students who are known to be able to cope with rather threatening experiences in the classroom. It's powerful stuff, use sparingly.

Alternatively, we can take some material, as suggested already, from the tape-recorded production of students involved in communicative activities and devote some attention to what's happening at the linguistic level in that production. With some teacher guidance, this type of language lesson can develop from the students' own reactions to what they had said in some previous activity.

Here is an example of some student commentary on the way one of them, who had been in the role of an eyewitness, had described a car-crash scene in a previous lesson. (The elicitation material can be found in Brown & Yule, 1983)

Student 1 (on tape): the car the car is going to
go on the up road - and the bus wants to
- em a - avance - the lorry - and so the
bus when he when it sees the car coming
it has to stop

Teacher: So, did you all understand what happened?

Student 1: oh - it wasn't good - I don't remember
that word - em - is it "advance"?

Student 2: you mean "take over"

Student 3: it's "pass" - "pass the lorry"

Teacher: right - it wants to "overtake the lorry" or
"pass the lorry" - so you did follow that -
anything else?

Student 1: I said "he" for the bus - I think

Teacher: did you?

Student 3: yes she said "he sees" for the bus - it
means the driver - the driver of the bus
he sees the car

Teacher: right - but it didn't sound odd

Student 4: can you say "the car coming" - not "is
coming"?

Student 1: I didn't say it "the car coming"

Teacher: oh I don't remember - let's play it again
and listen for that

This type of activity has the advantage of allowing the teacher to become one of the group discussing the message-form and to be in a position to offer specific lexical and grammatical support precisely when it is needed, in a way that no dictionary or grammar book could ever supply. A clear disadvantage would be that, if students are actually avoiding certain words or structures in their spoken production, then such structures may not come up for discussion at all. If the teacher becomes aware of the fact that a particular structure which could be usefully employed by the students is not being used, then there are options for giving it some exposure.

An interesting exercise developed by Nelson (this volume) creates scenarios in which speakers have to state their choices. One of the natural structures provided by the English language for expressing those choices is the relative clause construction. Without necessarily being aware that they are taking part in a lesson on "forming relative clauses," students can become actively involved in saying things like I'd rather meet the man who won all the money or I'll take the one which you've opened already.

The trick, if that is the appropriate term, in this type of approach is to devise material which will foster skills in using the English language for self-expression, by using the language, rather than developing knowledge of the English language, by treating it as a subject like history or geography.

The Teacher's Skills

It should now be apparent that the "communicative approach" places a premium on different skills, as far as the teacher is concerned, than most traditional approaches. That charismatic twenty-minute presentation on the way relative clauses are formed in English (you know, with the really clear examples, using the whole blackboard efficiently, different colored chalk to highlight the relative pronouns, all that stuff) is, unfortunately, not really appreciated in the communicative approach. Instead,

the required skills seem to involve producing material which will stimulate the student to use the English language to actually talk to someone. This can take the form of exercises which lead the student to use relative clause structures, as noted already, rather than to hear about them from the teacher.

The "skill" required of the teacher, then, is a certain amount of ingenuity in coming up with a set of exercise types which give students "roles" and "topics." This doesn't have to be "role-play" and "what I did on the weekend," but such formats are clearly heading in the appropriate direction. The natural classroom setting for such activities is no longer teacher-at-front, class-in-rows, but involves a roving teacher and students in pairs or groups. The "center of attention" in the classroom, then, has to shift and, if considered beneficially, creates the opportunity for the teacher to get among the students while they are trying to produce their messages. The teacher is then available as a resource (for example, for vocabulary) at the precise moment when the student needs such a resource. It's a great idea, but it takes some practice. The problem with the "communicative approach" is not that the skills required of the teacher are particularly novel, since most teachers have, in one form or another, been developing their own exercises and getting among their own students, but that other skills, previously valued, have been pushed aside. A different type of ingenuity in running an ESL class is now required, and for the same low pay, the ESL teacher is expected to have developed it overnight.

From Function to Form

A good example of the ingenuity now required of the ESL teacher within the "communicative approach" involves a substantial mental shift to treat what she knows about the English language in terms of function rather than form. She can appreciate that this makes sense, but most of her training has been concerned with linguistic form rather than communicative function. Indeed, an exercise designed to get students "communicating" via the use of relative clauses, as mentioned earlier, is still motivated by the idea that the English language

can be characterized as a set of forms or structures such as the relative clause.

An alternative view might note that we do not "relative-clause" to each other via language, but we certainly try to "identify objects and distinguish them from others" for the benefit of our hearers. This functional view then treats linguistic forms, including the relative clause, as a means of accomplishing that identification. It can be accomplished by other, non-linguistic means, and those, as Tarone (1981) pointed out, must be included in the set of "strategies" of communication.

In performing an "identifying" function via language, we clearly can help ourselves to relative clause structures, as well as other descriptive noun phrase (NP) types. For example, I'm talking about the new professor (NP containing adjective) - the one who wears the weird shirts (NP containing relative clause) - you know - the guy from California (NP containing prepositional phrase), or that function is equally served by proper names, Mike Hammond or job titles, Director of Metrical Phonology Incorporated, and so on. Given such a range of forms which can fulfill a particular function, we have to predict that the more functionally oriented the activity devised, the less predictable will be the actual language elicited from the speaker. Consequently, the ESL teacher following such an approach will have to operate with a much more open view of what can count as "acceptable" responses by her students in the performance of a communicative task.

Probably the greatest ingenuity required, then, is in the actual creation of the types of tasks which will encourage the students' use of a range of communicative functions. Some tasks are easier to envisage than others. Descriptive tasks can be based on photos or pictures, and narrative tasks on strip cartoons or short videotapes. If the teacher keeps in mind the requisite properties of a communicative activity, outlined earlier, then the student speaking should be in a position of intentionally conveying some information to a recipient who needs that information. It follows that the recipient should be another student or students (not the "all-knowing" teacher), who also

will have a task to perform, and that there should be an information gap between the two participants involved. For more on such tasks, try Brown & Yule (1983).

Following such an approach, the teacher is in a position to say that what is happening in her ESL classroom is definitely not "excommunicative." Students are being given the opportunity to use the language, they are developing strategies of communication, and can be encouraged to manipulate whatever linguistic resources they have, rather than to search (in grammar book or dictionary) for the precisely correct structure or word. We might note here that, under different circumstances, we might want to teach vocabulary, by whatever method we prefer (see Richards, this volume, for suggestions), but, when involved in a communicative activity, students should be encouraged to manipulate their basic working vocabulary (for example, it's a kind of thing you use to look at very small things you can't see) rather than to stop because they can't remember the precise term (e.g. microscope). Manipulative skills with language, even with a limited repertoire, must lead to greater participation in the activities of the English speaking community than being in possession of a non-manipulative extensive knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. If we can accept this notion, we may then start to make sense of the idea, put forward by writers such as Breen & Candlin (1980) and Tarone (1984), that language learning and development can take place in the very process of trying to communicate and particularly by having to solve communicative problems.

We really do not want to train "ESL-classroomees" and we cannot believe that we should be preparing our students to be dependent on our being there to do all the English language talking. We should be giving them practice in solving communicative problems, with our support certainly, but with an aim to developing those skills which will allow them to participate in the general English speaking community. Our role, after all, is to prepare them to get by without us.

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